

We bow our hearts in prayer: Lord, let at last thine angels, to Abram's bosom bear me home, that I may die unfearing. And in its narrow chamber keep My body safe in peaceful sleep Until Thy reappearing. And then from death awaken me That these mine eyes with joy may see, O Son of God, Thy glorious face, My Savior and my Fount of grace. Lord Jesus Christ, My prayer attend, my prayer attend, And I will praise Thee without end. Amen.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear fellow redeemed,

In Romans chapter 8, St. Paul is confessing the most beautiful Gospel –

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. [vs. 1]

You have been set from your natural captivity to sin and death.

You now have spiritual life by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And by the power of the Holy Spirit, you are heirs with Christ of eternal life,

Romans 8:329-30

predestined from eternity, **called** in time, **justified** by Christ, and awaiting to be **glorified**.

...And then

St. Paul seems to make a sharp turn... he starts talking about suffering, **suffering with Christ**.

But in reality, he's been talking about suffering for awhile, which is why he is applying the Gospel.

More specifically in this context, he is talking about suffering from two areas,

suffering coming from this corrupted world, which he describes as **groaning** since the Fall into sin, and the **groaning** of our New Man, suffering under our corruption of our sinful nature.

What is a Christian to do about suffering? This is what St. Paul is asking in the first question of the text.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. ^(ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen* (John 17:17)

When St. Paul goes into all the things that try **to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus**, he is not just talking about impersonal neutral forces.

There are real angels and rulers who are intent on separating you from God,

and they are powerful and intelligent, crafty, using anything and everything at their disposal.

Now I said angels, just as St. Paul did, didn't I? Are there really angels trying to do this?

Well, yes and no, so let's clarify.

When God created the world, He also created angels to serve both God and man.

These angels also received the declaration on the 7th day that they were "very good," perfect.

But some time after the 7th day, a number of those angels rebelled against the Lord led by the angel we often call "the devil," or Satan.

So it is a correct term to call them angels.

But for clarity, we usually will call these evil angels... demons.

And they are at work trying to separate us from the love of God.

Now often when God gives us a glimpse of spiritual realities that we normally cannot perceive, people take all sorts of license in "filling out the picture," if you will.

This is true about angels and demons as well.

And so we have sayings like, "Every time a bell rings, an angel gets its wings."

Or the idea that angels are humans who have died.

Or that cartoonish idea of an angel and a demon standing on your shoulders as your conscience.

These are all rubbish and downplay their real and serious efforts and works.

If you want to meditate on the real workings of the demonic angels, consider God's servant Job.

In the book of Job we get a glimpse into spiritual things that we would not otherwise know.

We see Satan standing before God's throne, permitted an audience (before Christ's death & res.)

And during this audience, he sounds bored, going back and forth across the earth, looking for a challenge, but God was preventing him from any really challenges.

When the Lord speaks of righteous Job, Satan (whose name means "the accuser") accuses Job of being a fair-weather believer, only believing in God because the Lord has protected him and his family and his wealth so that Satan cannot do any real harm.

Then God does something that would terrify any of us: He takes away most of Job's protection, first from everything that is around Job, and then finally from Job's own body.

Fellow Redeemed, here is where we get to see the true villainy and desire of the devil against us.

He wastes no opportunity and straightaway takes everything he can away from Job:

his wealth (by taking his flocks and herds), his servants, his children, and then his health.

But he thoughtfully leaves Job's wife, who tells him to "curse God and die,"

and his 'friends' who continue to accuse him of wrong-doing as the reason for the calamities.

You can bet that Satan had this all planned out for greatest impact to cause Job's physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual distress.

But do you suppose that Job was his only target in all of history?

Well, we know what he did to Adam and Eve and how much that has affected us.

In Revelation, Jesus revealed to St. John the great battle **in heaven with Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back.** Revelation 12:7

And throughout Jesus' earthly ministry and even after, we hear of Jesus casting out demons from many people with all sorts of physical expressions,

some mute^{Matt 9}, some with epileptic tendencies^{Mark 5}, some insane, some with supernatural strength,

or the ability to tell the future,^{Acts 16} some having seven demons, like Mary Magdalene,^{Mark 16}

and some having "Legion," who when cast out drowned an entire heard of pigs.^{Mark 5}

Do you suppose that the devil and his angels are now done with their attacks?

We do not have full insight into how the spiritual realm always operates in the physical realm.

Is any of our current epidemic of depression and mental illness caused by demons?

We know that Satan entered into Judas who acted rationally, even if vilely, as he betrayed Jesus.

Who else in history and even now acts so wickedly because he is possessed?

But what other things do they influence throughout the world and in your personal life?

The truth is, we don't know and that also can cause us fear when we consider it apart from God's Word.

And even more, Jesus tells us that the devil is still at work, when the sower sows His seed,

"the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown..."

So that even when the Lord would speak to us words of comfort and hope

in the face of fear or terror, we can yet ignore and even reject His tender help.

But St. Paul brings these sufferings and fears to mind, not so that we become fearful or terrified, but so that we know the answer to these fears when they come upon us.

And while the Lord also tells us about the great good that His angels do for us in protecting us, as they did for Daniel while he was in the lion's den,^{Daniel 6}

or fighting for us, as they did for Elisha when the Syrian army came to capture him,^{2 Kings 6}

or delivering us from evil as the two angels did for Lot and his daughters;^{Genesis 19}

or guarding us from ourselves, as they did for Adam & Eve keeping them from the Tree of Life,

^{Genesis 3}

and as they did for St. John who when he bowed down to worship one of them,

directed him to worship God alone;^{Revelation 19}

And while the Lord tells us that there are many of them at His disposal,^{Matthew 26:53}

and that they watch over us while constantly seeing the face of God,^{Matthew 18}

and that they rejoice over one sinner who repents,^{Luke 15}

and that they join with us in singing our praises to God as we recognized in the Te Deum,

"To You all angels cry aloud, the heavens and all the powers therein;

To You cherubim and seraphim continually do cry..."^(ELH p. 114)

notice that these are not the reason that you have hope and even joy in the face of suffering.

St. Paul doesn't point you to the angels but to Jesus and even more specifically, to His work of redemption as your hope and joy in suffering.

The most concentrated expression of God's love for you is found in the Father's not sparing

but giving up His only-begotten and beloved Son into death for you,

so that He could declare you righteous, perfect, holy in His sight.

This righteousness is accredited to you on account of Christ's righteousness,

who, though He **was tempted in every way that you are**

(and even more so under the devil's temptations in the wilderness for 40 days ^{Matthew 4}),

overcame, or conquered, the devil's attacks and **was without sin.** ^{Hebrews 4:15}

As God's child, washed, not in angels' blood, but in Christ's blood through Baptism, you are holy.

Yet Satan, the Accuser, wants to accuse you before your Father's throne.

He wants to defile your conscience with fears of judgment, just as he desired to with Job,

and so uses the sufferings you have in this life to convince you that God does not love you;

that He is angry with you and will continue this suffering in eternity in the flames of hell

where Satan himself will be.

But here St. Paul points out that Satan has no place in God's judgment hall.

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

And while Satan and his demons strive to condemn your heart, St. Paul bats him away saying,

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

So if your Savior is the defense attorney... as well as the judge, jury, and executioner, then what do you need to fear, either in this life or in the life to come?

Of present sufferings or future sufferings?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, just as Job was, who by the work of the Holy Spirit,

even in the face of all his suffering boldly confessed his conquest over Satan, sin, and death,

I know that my Redeemer lives and more, after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.^{Job19:25-26}

This truth is so sure that your Savior revealed to St. John the outcome

of that great battle between St. Michael and the dragon,

[the dragon] was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.^{Revelation12}

Who shall separate [you] from the love of Christ?

...neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come,

nor powers, nor cancer, nor illness, nor abuse, nor neglect,

nor depression, nor anxiety, nor bullies, nor governments,

nor loneliness, nor popularity **nor anything else in all creation,**

will be able to separate [you] from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,

For there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Glory be to the Father...

Soli Deo Gloria